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Reviews

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Nancy McCleery, *Staying the Winter,* poems; The Cummington Press, 1987; 70 pages, hardbound; $20.00

Staying the Winter is, first of all, a beautiful object. Hard-bound in a Dutch-linen cover and showing all the skill and care of Harry Duncan's letterpress printing, it is also a book which shows the whole spectrum of Nancy McCleery's piercingly gentle perceptions.

Some poets at midlife collapse under the burden of themselves. Others shed the seasonal accoutrements of youth and come to us bravely and whole with their new and clearer vision of the world and their place in it.

On Approaching Fifty

Yesterday this cottonwood
broke my heart with its beauty.
It's just another tree today
and I am thankful
it dropped its yellow leaves
overnight.

And now
the task of standing barren
before the world

and wordless
except for the wind.

Most of the poems in *Staying the Winter* carry with them this mature vision, and readers will recognize the power of a voice which, without being didactic, has begun to teach as well as delight.

Like other poets who are sensitive to the natural environment, many of McCleery's poems gather in images from the places she has been and show her appreciation for and understanding of the earth and its creatures. There are old barns, scenes on the Platte, and many other images that remind us that this poet has been deeply nurtured by the Nebraska landscape. But transforming the poems beyond a celebration of the tangible is a wonderful sense of the enduring nature of affection through time. It's as if she were saying that all meaning—personal, historical, anthropological—were knit together, not just through perceptions of the mind, but of the heart. And for McCleery, geography of landscape is never far from geography of her own imagination and of her own body. The sensuality of the love poems is never far from the deep affection which moves out across the world and across history, whether like the monarch butterflies "flying the song of their colors" or like the "Bright flowers at the feet of mastodons/ encased in millenniums of ice."

I think no reader who has only known McCleery's poems sprinkled here and

there in magazines and anthologies has fully experienced her work. As a collection, the poems lean together well. Together they read like variations on one much more powerful theme than a reader would be able to detect in any single poems.

Jim Heynen

Lee Bassett, *Lucy and the Blue Quail*; Arrowood Books, Inc., Corvallis, Oregon; $15.00 cloth, $8.00 paper.

There is a fever in New Orleans, yellow fever. New Orleans may just as well be Memphis, and a fever, a fire. In Chicago the ambulances line up, racing for the bodies. Everywhere there is an epidemic called life, almost within reach:

> "And in the backyard garden
> there is nothing, without the powerful
> face of the sun. Oh, the sun is a big
> truth, and oh, there is nothing
> without cars beginning their morning
> roar into commerce, without the chatter
> of the world in and out of the great
> clean hospital behind this man." (3)

This man is Otis Henry Gray, the Blue Quail, Delta Blues musician gone north to Chicago. Lucy is with him. She has found him. They are on the road, and alive. Ultimately, Lucy is going to drown, get "drownded good." In the form of a book length poem, Lee Bassett has written the story of *Lucy and the Blue Quail.*

Lee Bassett wrote it; someone else tells it. Someone else remembers them, remembers it all. Someone else writes to Maret, the woman Maret, the slave woman on the lost ship of Christopher Columbus:

"Maret, we had sad people where we lived. . ." (12)

". . . Maret, I remember the first day
my train smoked into town. . ." (13)

"Sometimes Maret, you would be raw again." (15)

". . . how many people did you think
were in the emptiness inside you?" (15)

> ". . . When I remake those days,
> I take your hand in ritual,
> and remember your sad deep features.
> Come dear slow Maret, walk along with me
> and walk the bitterness away. . ." (18)

Lucy and the Blue Quail is told in three parts: Cry for Home, Yellow Fever, and Underwater. The whole circles round and round Otis Henry's story, the Blue Quail's story, the musician's, the man many wanted to cut with a knife. Circles and circles,

a story revealing itself by innuendo, in fragments, through isolated moments. Maybe though, the story isn't true:

> ". . . What he doesn't know is,
> everything behind him is a lie,
> no matter how he sings it in the afternoon.
> He has never been to Chicago,
> my friend and his story are wrong." (20)

I'm not sure but I think the narrator traveled with Lucy and Otis Henry. I think they played music together in town after town, and when they weren't playing, they worked in the fields, working the harvest. One day they woke up far from home and found they'd lost themselves:

> "And they put me to care for old Harry
> the impersonator, the false man.
> After each act, that garbled man arrived
> in his dressing room, where I waited for him.
> My job was to pick up all his human faces." (25)

There are others in the story—Sober Sue, whose paralyzed face allowed her to live without smiling and thus gave her a job in the circus; the black ghost; the candle on Lucy's table in the shape of a human being; Vaudeville Sam, who is not Sad Sam nor Poor Sam nor Dark Sam; and Marta. "They were comedians or so it seemed." (29)

So it seemed, for they may have led other lives altogether. In Part three—Underwater—it turns out:

> "We personally don't remember any vaudeville in our town,
> and we cannot recall his friend named Sam. And we don't
> remember any girl named Marta." (35)

Lucy and the Blue Quail is the perhaps true biography of one Otis Henry Gray, the man still in the shadow. If only he would step out, we could see him so clearly. But he won't. Lee Bassett knew that and so he told Otis Henry's story the only way he could—in fits and starts, the way the life was lived. What is lost by the absence of linear narrative is more than paid back in evocation. Bassett's telling is filled by grace, mystery and tears. Otis Henry becomes in the end, as he himself describes his last woman friend, "That disturbingly beautiful human being." (42)

I deeply admire *Lucy and the Blue Quail*. I hope my comments suggest some of the feeling I was given by the book. Though Lee Bassett has published numerous chapbooks—*The Mapmaker's Lost Daughter, Hatsutaiken, Gauguin and Food, News from the Past Mistakes Hermitage*—from several publishers—Blue Begonia Press, Copper Canyon Press, Dooryard Press—*Lucy and the Blue Quail* is his first full length poetry collection. It is a revelatory book, a poem story told simply and sparely. As the life is revealed, the deep and true mystery of that life grows infinite—the life of Otis Henry Gray, the Blue Quail who could pull music from anything, and the life of his friend and lover Lucy.

A little in awe of the beauty of this book, I want to say to Lee Bassett, as Lucy said to Otis Henry on first meeting:

"I don't believe you, I don't believe
the sound you make.
Let me see, let me see what you have under that washtub." (47)

But there's nothing under the washtub. The truth is both Otis Henry and Lee Bassett do make that sound, the true impossible sound.

Lucy and the Blue Quail is the first publication from Arrowood Books, Inc. of Corvallis, Oregon. The story and the writing are compelling, and the book itself is well made—sturdy, attractive and modest. It's an object that will hold up as it is passed from hand to hand, as it will be passed. May ensuing books from Arrowood be as complete as this one.

David Romtvedt

Nancy Schoenberger, *Girl on a White Porch*, poems; University of Missouri Press, 1987; 64 pages, paper; $6.96.

Nancy Schoenberger's *Girl On A White Porch* begins, appropriately enough, at the Beginning. "My Grandmother's Quilt," the first poem of the book, compresses biblical stories and personal history.

Let the dominant yellow patches stand for Ruth
in the alien corn, for blonde fields
where we stood, homesick and drowning,
in every state of the Union. . . (13)

Ms. Schoenberger takes her grandmother's example to heart, using snips of her own life and tying them to larger, deeper patterns. The book's pattern is that of the journey, and although it's also a chronological journey, it is mostly a journey of the spirit through the opposing states of regret and desire, into vision, and back to the world.

The first section deals with lost childhood. All the poems are in the past tense by an adult voice. In "Perdita," the narrator says,

The last time I sat at Cafe du Monde
I watched the pigeons swirl like a cape
around Jackson's horse, in Jackson's square,
sky gilded like a rococo sky, a place
like any other, to tell the truth—
perhaps more pink. I went to Pierre Part
and the labyrinthine channels of water,
now empty of significance. . . (14)

This loss of "significance" recurs in the first section. Old dresses, lush landscapes, and communication, especially, are either thrown away, not touched, or not attempted. "We drove straight through that landscape/ without speaking//," she says in "Traveling With Mother." The only excitement the narrator feels occurs at the end of the section, in a transitional poem "My Mother's Dresses," when she

remembers her mother's party dresses "on their hangers, scattered about her room—/ my dresses now" (25).

The girl has grown into a woman. The narrator moves from regret to desire. The poems in this section switch from the first person point of view to a more distant, third person point of view. The narrator suddenly becomes many women, all impassioned. The masks of desire are many: a woman who lives in a villa; a woman who "long-legged, bleeding, slips through/ the white woods" (38); a young woman who has a vision of Christ. They all want to, as the woman watching Carnival in "Flambeaux" wants to "one day marry the fire/ rushing headlong into the caesura/ burning up her days in a cold place in a red dress" (30). Slowly, desire's dark potential appears. "Is that a cobra or a dancing woman/ asway on its glazed surface" (39), the narrator wonders as she looks at a painting of irises. The final poem of this section, a retelling of Beauty and the Beast, is a confrontation between Beauty and her unseen captor.

> . . . The door opened
>
> where the beast lay sleeping.
>
> O my friend, how could I know
> you walked with a crippled step, horned,
> hooved, and speechless? Our eyes met—
> had you meant to speak? But those afternoons,
>
> the sun's stripe
>
> laid across the bushes, and then
> your steps on the pebbled walk
>
> as you came each night to forgive me
> my disguises (41).

The knowledge Beauty gains from this confrontation, some deep recognition of Truth, provides the transition into the third section.

"Galleria" is a series of poems based on Italian paintings. In the paintings, the narrator apparently finds both regret and desire contained and cooperating. "Filippo's Madonna contemplates Nature. The child instructs her/ supported by his angel, their skin like touched gardenias./ They are contained in a series of circles" (45). As the paintings progress, the narrator begins to understand art's power to make beauty from opposites. In the last poem of this section, spirit and nature weave together into a "well-ordered universe of circling souls,/ slowly descending into this gorgeous world" (51). This section is kept neatly together with repetition, both sexual and historical.

With this knowledge, the narrator returns to the world in the final section. She seems to be more able to deal with the extremes of the world. In "This Is Missoula," she says, "The world is nearly itself/ when the black trees hug the snow" (35). The image is a simple but effective way to reveal the balance she has found. In another place, she says, "always the bridge between home and town,/ the moon in her black well." And in the last poem, "By Certain Rivers," she sums up her acceptance of the world's extremes:

> . . . by certain rivers
> boats are unloading their precious cargo—
> cows, sheep, pigs; by certain rivers
> we came down and the men surrounded us,
> taking us in their arms, their bleached
> suits glowing, all the women waving and crying
> for those who were coming, those
> who were going away (64).

The theme of the journey is an old but still strong pattern of human experience, and Ms. Schoenberger's art makes it evocative as well as nostalgic. She can approach sentimentalism, keeping her lines full of sound and fire. She takes many risks in this book: writing about one's childhood risks the reader's disinterest and scorn these days, as does writing about paintings. But *Girl On The White Porch* takes an important and successful journey. These poems aren't blatant but subtle, much like the grandmother's quilt, made of little bits of specific color, all the while creating a larger, deeper framework.

Jeff Oaks

William Kittredge, *Owning It All*, essays; Graywolf Press, 1987; 182 pages, paper; $8.00.

In *Owning It All*, a collection of autobiographical essays, William Kittredge describes the art of "balancing water" on his family's high desert ranch as a "night and day process of opening and closing pipes and redwood headgates and running the 18-inch drainage pumps."

The image of "balancing water" as it gushes through a hundred miles of canals conjures what Kittredge does with language and ideas in these 14 essays. With remarkable clarity and precision, Kittredge continually traces the mythology underlying Western life, and then plays it against the reality. When he writes of his irrigated fields, he also writes of the barren alkali flats beyond the levee. If he tells of a former rodeo world champion, instead of glory and roaring crowds he shows the champion's face covered with bugs from driving 1,000 miles in a windshield-less Cadillac. High desert irony gets expressed as buggy teeth.

But what makes Kittredge's essays unique is the strength of his voice and point of view. He never loses nor lets the reader lose the sense that he is talking about the stories we tell ourselves, and that to tell these stories and then make sense of them is to tell further stories. Whether he's writing about grizzly bears or native art or farming or the arc a life might take, Kittredge gives his essays and ideas a self-awareness, an almost biological consciousness, as though they know their own birth.

Consider the following from "Owning it All":

> We were doing God's labor and creating a good place on earth, living the pastoral yeoman dream—that's how our mythology defined it, although nobody would ever have thought about work in that way. And then it all went dead, over years, but swiftly.

. . . . . .

> In quite an actual way we had come to victory in the artistry of our playground warfare against all that was naturally alive in our native home. We had reinvented our valley according to the most persuasive ideal given us by our culture, and we ended with a landscape organized like a machine for growing crops and fattening cattle, a machine that creaked a little louder each year, a dreamland gone wrong.

That contrast ultimately tipped the scales for Kittredge, who left ranching life in 1967 for a M.F.A. degree from the Iowa Writer's Workshop and a career that led to a national reputation as an essayist and short story writer. During his last years of farming, Kittredge writes in "Leaving," he studied the ripening barley and the alkali flatland and began "to recognize and name the malaise that drove me to leave."

> Both the stillness of the field and that expanse of alkali shimmered in the heat, and both were empty. Leaning on the tailgate of my pickup, I first came to my awareness that this valley where I had always lived had gone lifeless in some terrible way, and I was frightened.

Kittredge has such a deft grasp on the interplay between Western mythology and reality that he repeatedly brings the reader to similar, and equally stunning, recognitions. These essays speak to the dreamer in us, and then show how, inevitably, that dreamer becomes dream killer. Reading them, you hear the gushing irrigation water and you see the two results: the crops that live and the desert that dies. Yet you also become aware of the voice of the irrigator, the narrator, the one who balances.

"That system," Kittredge writes, "was the finest plaything I ever had." Balancing water. Or language.

Doug O'Harra

Sandra Alcosser, *A Fish to Feed All Hungers*, poems; Virginia University Press, 1986; 64 pages, cloth; $10.00.

Sandra Alcosser, a graduate of the University of Montana's M.F.A. program, has just published her first collection of poetry. *A Fish to Feed All Hunger* is imagistically original and troubling, while it outlines a cohesive vision of what is true and possible. There is, in these poems, a relentless assertion of a central obsession, which is the mark of all work that aspires to greatness.

Alcosser's vivid pictures enter the deep part of our minds, where we acknowledge our nightmare dreams.

> Crossing the pass at Thorong La, your brain
> begins to swell. You sleep in the arms
> of a sherpa who feeds you opium, picks
> leeches from your body. You would die,
> but the rain is too lonely.

In the valley his family touches your chest,
the curly black hair, and says *fine. Very Fine.*
You swim with buffalo in the river. A child
washes her mother there. She pulls off a piece
of the dead woman's shoulder and shares it
with her father.

("Each Bone a Prayer")

These poems empathize with the primal undergirding of existence—they are an ordered speaking of the violent will to live. This will is not for a particular purpose, connection or place, but to live as predator or prey. These are the only choices available to any living thing, according to the world of Alcosser's poetry.

An elusive courage is claimed—one that dwells in the house of fear and is unconvinced of any promise of love or release. Courage is shown in small acts of generosity, as in "The Disposition of Hands."

And for me, and for my family,
perhaps the grace of small deeds will suffice.
To remove the pine siskin from the cat's teeth,
to free the half-mad fox from its trap.
To carry tea and buttered crackers
to a dying aunt.

These are miracles of the possible—the only places of rest in an existence dominated by the rule of power. In this world, sex that does not pretend to be a movement toward the other, but is fearful and seeks to dominate or be dominated, is the only truth of coupling. Sex has death at its core.

I myself prefer small scenes. I would have liked Henri.
We could have spent the day together on our hands and knees,
year after year the same weed lot, studying the digger wasp
as she squeezed a wild bee to her breast, then turned
to lick honey from its gasping tongue.

("The Entomologists' Landscape")

There is a brave sadness in these poems, a determination to understand what takes place beneath cultural illusions. But by studying the weed lot with Henri, and with lush language that loves the wasps, Alcosser claims a true innocence that comes from unflinching confrontation with the brutal world.

Bette Tomlinson

Michael Dorris; *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water;* Holt; $16.95 Cloth, $7.95 paper.

Set in the Pacific Northwest, primarily on a Montana Indian reservation, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* says much about family relationships and the complex interac-

tions that bind us together. Three unforgettable women move the reader backward thru a forty year time span, each narrating a part of their story. Their secrets, loves, betrayals and failures reveal much about themselves and each other.

The reader first meets Rayona, who at fifteen is searching her world for her own answers. Like most teenagers she has heard one side of the story but has eyes that observe another. Christine presents the next generation's view. She too sought answers and escaped to another world but, disillusioned once too often, returns to the reservation to die. Mysterious Ida is the last to speak—

> "I have to tell this story. . . No one but me carries it all and no one will—unless I tell Rayona, who might understand. She's heard her mother's side and she's got eyes. But she doesn't guess what happened before. She doesn't know my true importance. She doesn't realize that I am the story. . ."

Michael Dorris has written a remarkable story. The triple narrative works well, so well that the reader wants to immediately re-read sections to identify the subtle clues that bond daughter, mother and grandmother.

Barbara Theroux

Theodore Weesner, *The True Detective;* Summit Books, 1987. 383 pp.

Several years ago I found a brief article in the *New York Times* about a young boy who had been arrested for stealing a car. The police traced him through the library book they found in the recovered car; the book was Ted Weesner's *The Car Thief* (recently out in paperback, Vantage Books). Weesner's new novel, *The True Detective*, is also about crime, the crime all parents fear most: the abduction of a child.

The True Detective is not just another detective novel. The genre gives Weesner the opportunity to do what he does best: look deeply into characters under stress to see who they are and what makes them work. The themes of adolescence, broken homes and poverty that make *The Car Thief* a compelling book are continued and expanded in *The True Detective*, a book notable for its empathetic portrayal of everyone involved in the crime which jolts the thriving small city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, out of its self-conscious colonial quaintness.

Eric Wells is a six-year-old boy who disappears on his way home from walking his mother to work. His older brother is off in pursuit of a girl, and Eric's mind is spinning with conjecture about a valentine he found in his school desk. His mother is a waitress trying to get by on tips and making chili for the diner; his father is long-gone, a distant memory, a drunk who abandoned his family. Eric is lured into a car by a student named Vernon from the nearby University, and the intense study of this tragedy begins.

Vernon is the criminal of the story, a college boy of uncertain sexual orientation, desperately lonely and overwhelmed by sexual longing. His mother is a domineering and promiscuous force in his life, his young lover Anthony has just rejected him, he lives in a house with homophobic housemates who suspect he is a fag and threaten him. Vernon has been obsessed for years with a magazine

showing the love affair of two young boys, and in his sexual desperation he goes to a porno palace to watch movies. This experience doesn't fulfill his longing, so he goes to a gay bar, is picked up but can't follow through with the adventure he has begun. He is on his way home when he sees young Eric walking down the street.

Gilbert Dulac is a veteran of the Portsmouth police force, and considers Portsmouth his town. He is a faithful husband whose only regret is that he has no children, and he takes a personal interest in the disappearance of Eric Wells. Both efficient and dogged, Dulac pursues every angle he can think of to track down the missing boy, relying on traditional police methods as well as enlisting the aid of a psychologist from the University. Pornography and its role in sexual crimes becomes a central issue in the novel, with the skeptical psychologist's academic views undergoing a harsh confrontation with contrary evidence.

The novel becomes two parallel detective stories. In one, Dulac tracks down every possible lead and conjecture, trying to identify the criminal in time to save Eric; Dulac's search is for who and where. In the meantime, through Weesner's bold use of point of view and unwavering empathy, the reader learns why and how. *The True Detective* is a psychological study of sexual development, and pornography, of poverty and broken homes—children without fathers, fathers without children, one mother without money for her children and another without love for her son. The novel is suspenseful and frightening, but also deeply understanding. There is an inevitability to the events in the novel that is as awful as it is recognizable, and the story is portrayed in all its facets with a sharp and sympathetic eye, a calm and reasonable voice. Weesner writes of vital, painful themes with rare grace and wisdom.

Paul Hoornbeek

Patricia Goedicke, *Listen, Love*; Barnwood Press, 1986

The title of Patricia Goedicke's eighth book of poems, *Listen, Love*, tells us what to expect: this volume does not reach out to the reader; rather, it draws us in to the poet's private, intense world of love. We overhear the poet's dialogue with her beloved, and with herself.

The vivid sensual imagery characteristic of Goedicke's work is enchanting here:

> Now as you fold me
> Now as you spread me out
>
> Hearts and diamonds in whole necklaces
>
> The single note of a loon
> Wails me down the stone steps
>
> (from "Green Harbor")

Many of the poems are erotic, but not simply erotic—through Goedicke's celebration of physical pleasure, we apprehend the spiritual realm of the poet's love. Don't expect sweetness and light because of the poet's subject. There are sweet moments, especially in the portraits of Leonard Robinson, to whom the book is dedicated:

This man who was mugged once
Listening to other people's problems

On streetcorners, helping out beggars
Promising what he can't deliver

This man who wants to be a hero,
A brave regiment, a banner

from "This Man (Who Wants to Forget the Nightmare)"

But *Listen, Love* is not a collection of poems about young, illusive love; Goedicke's love is a wise love, infused with joy and pain, comfort and terror, risk and discovery. There is an urgency here, too—the poet does not know, we do not know, the future. In her poem "Though We Live Between Jaws" the poet confronts the "brief world of the wave breaking":

And even though we live between jaws
Precarious, perched in the branches of trees . . .

Still I would have us live here forever,
Breathing into each other's mouths

The rhythm of the poetry, Goedicke's frequent use of two-line stanzas and her dense imagery help to convey the urgency. But there is also the bravery in the poet's voice, the willingness to make the voyage,

. . . even though I capsize often,
Though rocks rake my cheeks,

Though fear rides the center current

from "Lucky (On June 21, 1976)"

There is no world beyond the intimate in *Listen, Love*. In "Summer Solstice (6/21/81)," Goedicke acknowledges the borders of intimacy:

I know there are starved bellies
And armies of chaos out there, and eyes

Crying out to be filled,

But this is my world to walk in
Too

Goedicke not only walks in this world, she does handstands across it. When she says, later in the same poem:

How fortunate I have been!

we believe her. This love is a generous love, filled with passion and compassion.

Listen, Love whispers, shouts, cries; we are the fortunate eavesdroppers.

Deborah O'Harra

Seamus Heaney, *The Haw Lantern*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1987; $12.95

Half way through this collection by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney there is this poignant remembrance:

Clearances
in memoriam M.K.H., 1911-1984

She taught me what her uncle once taught her:
How easily the biggest coal block split
If you got the grain and the hammer angled right.

The sound of that relaxed alluring blow,
Its co-opted and obliterated echo,
Taught me to hit, taught me to loosen,

Taught me between the hammer and the block
To face the music. Teach me now to listen,
To strike it rich behind the linear black.

From his first collection, "Death of a Naturalist" to "The Haw Lantern," just published in October, 1987, Heaney listens to those who profess not to "know all them things" the poet does. What is most distinctive about his poetry is his willingness, his insistence on returning to place and kinship.

Seamus Heaney grew up on a farm in Derry, a Catholic in the Protestant north, and therein lie the roots of his listening. At a roadblock a soldier peers into the poet's car:

and everything is pure interrogation
until a rifle motions and you move
with guarded unconcerned acceleration—

a little emptier, a little spent
as always by that quiver in the self,
subjugated, yes, and obedient.

Heaney is not one to mix art and politics. His complaint, then, is that physical intimidation can never solve the Ulster war. Interrogation and the threat of violence is anathema to this poet who prides himself with listening.

It is Heaney's own sense of Irishness that gives him his fullest expression: as an Irish poet he can both question and listen at the same time. In his poem "From the Land of the Unspoken" he says:

We are a dispersed people whose history
is a sensation of opaque fidelity.
When or why our exile began
among the speech-ridden, we cannot tell

In this collection are memoriams to an unnamed relative and to a famous poet; an occasional poem on the Baptism of an English niece; a "postcard" from Iceland to the poet's wife. And throughout, these voices uphold the belief that life deserves recognition. I'll end with "The Milk Factory," a poem thoroughly Heaney in its tone:

Scuts of froth swirled from the discharge pipe.
We halted on the other bank and watched
A milky water run from the pierced side
Of milk itself, the crock of its substance spilt
Across white limbo floors where shift-workers
Waded round the clock, and the factory
Kept its distance like a bright-decked star-ship

There we go, soft-eyed calves of the dew,
Astonished and assumed into fluorescence.

Joe Dwyer

"Northwest Variety: Personal Essays By 14 Regional Authors," edited by Lex Runciman and Steven Sher; Arrowood Books, Inc.; paperback, 151 pages; $9.50

"The printed word is being enriched by a lot more than a Douglas fir or a sprig of kinnikinnick these days" observes Portland poet Vi Gale in a recent release from Arrowood Books, *Northwest Variety: Personal Essays by 14 Regional Authors.* "Our old provincialism, if it ever was that, is fast being eroded."

And, with the help of these highly individualistic essays by Northwest poets, fiction writers, playwrights, and journalists, so are many other stereotypes about living and writing in the Northwest.

For instance, not all Northwest writers are ascribing to a Roethkian avoidance of mixing politics and poetry these days. Listen to the fierceness with which Port Townsend poet Sam Hamill writes, "As a poet, I am interested only in poetry that is aware of the need to radically alter the policies and priorities for those who rule." Hamill's concerns are very real, living "just forty minutes away from one of the most hideous products of mankind—the Trident nuclear submarine base at Bangor."

While the majority of these essays are excellent, the omission of Native American authors from any collection of Northwest writing is unfortunate. And perhaps the editors could have better represented writers from both Idaho and Montana. (Only one writer from each of these states is included.) The fact that 12 percent of the purchase price of the book will be donated to the Richard Hugo Memorial Fund at the University of Montana is of some consolation however.

William Kittredge's contribution to this collection, indeed to the literature of the Northwest, is nothing short of profound. The Missoula essayist, fiction and

screenplay writer elegantly reveals the relationship between his terrible need as a young man to begin "another version of my life, a story to tell myself and live by" and our cultural need for a new, more accurate mythology of the American West.

"The story is as old as settlements and invading armies and deeply problematical because it is at the heart of a racist, sexist, imperialist mythology of conquest, it is a rationale for violence, against other people and against nature. It is The Western, a morality play that was never much acted out anywhere in the 'Real West.' Or anywhere."

One way to change this myth is to create an intensely personal one, and Port Townsend poet, fiction writer, and essayist Tess Gallagher knows it. Gallagher gracefully merges the most intimate details of her childhood with the landscape in which she has always lived and the process of writing itself.

"My father's drinking and the quarrels he had with my mother because of it, terrorized my childhood. There is no other way to put it. And if coping with terror and anxiety are necessary to the psychic stamina of a poet, I had them in steady doses—just as inevitably as I had the rain."

Several of the authors focus on the strong influence that Pacific Rim nations have had on the Northwest. Ashland poet Lawson Fusao Inada, whose book "Before the War" is the first collection of poetry by an Asian-American to be published by a major firm, points to the Northwest as "the spawning ground of Asian-American literature."

Portland poet Vern Rutsala speculates that the diversity present in the poetry of Theodore Roethke encouraged the same diversity in this region's writers. Except for its lack of Native American voices, "Northwest Variety" keeps the promise made in its introduction to represent viewpoints as diverse as the Northwest landscape.

But readers who crave what Lewiston poet Robert Wrigley calls "the exuberant dance of Roethke," should not despair. Let Wrigley's words from the closing essay tickle your ears: "When I write a poem, I mean for it to swing. . . . I mean for it to have the plummet and rise of the Northwest landscape, the humps and canyons in its consonants, the wind-driven, river-borne music in its vowels."

Lee Evans

A. B. Guthrie, Jr., *Four Miles From Ear Mountain*; The Kutenai Press, Missoula, MT, 1987; 300 copies, numbered and signed by the author and artist; $30.00

Four Miles From Ear Mountain is Emily Strayer's finest design since she moved her press to Missoula. The hand set type in black text with red titles, the deep red fly sheets and the HMP Sierra covers which resemble hand pressed felt combine with the wood engravings by Kathy Bogan and, of course, the poems by A. B. Guthrie, Jr. to make this book a true treasure and collectors' item.

Guthrie's poems were written between 1935 and the present. While they are mostly metered and rhyming, they play well against their form, creating a subtle tension which is as intriguing and current today as when the first of the pieces was written. Guthrie defends his patterns this way,

> Since the moderns have declared rhyme a crime and equated alliteration and perdition, I feel woefully guilty. Yet on occasion I still yield to temptation. I'm like the man in church who rose and testified, "Brothers and sisters, I've tried sinnin' and not sinnin', and I declare to my soul I believe I like sinnin' the best."

Guthrie blends his fine-tuned sense of humor with seriousness. He has a great respect for history as it stands and points readily to the ludicrousness of the human race, especially Western America, when we attempt to change it for no reason. In *Seventh Cavalry*, he opens with the epigraph, "on hearing that it was proposed to exhume/ the remains of Custer's soldiers and rebury/ them in some more systematic order" and proceeds with a beautiful lyric with a chanting refrain, *"Let the bones lie."* No one would dare move them after reading this poem. One would even wonder why it had occurred to do so in the first place.

Guthrie has empathy and compassion for life cycles of humans and animals, for the ritualistic, predator-prey, nature of our interaction. (See *The Joyful Marksman* and *The Wild Bird*.) And not only can he wander, with eyes wide open, between the human and the animal but between history and progress as in *Of Roads and Reservoirs and Such*. And he can cross between cultures of the past —the white frontiersman and the native american; and the present —the progressive and the traditionalist. His insight is sharpshooting and scathing. Nothing gets past him. Finally his book is a series of impressions so lucid, from so many angles, that it is hard and unfair to separate the pieces from one another. We accept his criticism as well as his open spirituality. He is practical and straightforward, himself. In *End of the Line* he says, "Some sigh for rest./ Some dream of bliss,/ but all I believe for sure is this:/ Count not on the latter."

Guthrie ends *Four Miles From Ear Mountain* with four goodbyes. To Joe, he expresses his anger at being left but wishes him "Lie in peace, friend, lie." Sleepy the banjo player marches with the saints. The hermit dies alone as he wished it,

> We attended his burial
> Pallbearers, undertaker, preacher and I.
> We were all.
> A machine shoveled dirt over him.
> Not a cloud in the sky.

But Guthrie shows no regret in these goodbyes. He accepts death and the emotions it brings as part of the cycle. He is seemingly without guilt and is thus non-judgemental. Even to his brother, he can say, "You joked with few days remaining./ When death became boss/ you went uncomplaining."

B.G. Pughe

Linda M. Hasselstrom, *Going Over East: Reflections of a Woman Rancher*, Fulcrum, Golden, CO. 1987, $13.95, cloth

The personal essay has enjoyed a resurgence for the last few years, and this collection by poet and working rancher Linda Hasselstrom shows the inherent strengths of the tradition. We follow her on her daily rounds on her family ranch in the grasslands near the Black Hills of South Dakota. Each of the twelve gates she goes through frees yet another memory, another rumination. She holds value for ecosystems whether they be natural or social:

> . . . someone who pays attention to the messages the natural world sends can bring cattle home the day *before* a blizzard nine times out of ten. It's a matter of instinct, experience, self-reliance.

Hasselstrom's reflections may seem commonplace, but they are thoughts that don't often get expressed.

Joe Dwyer

John Barth, Giles Goat-Boy, The Sot-weed Factor; Anchor Press, doubleday; $9.95 paper

The first two of five John Barth novels are re-released in paper from the Anchor Literary library. *The Sot-weed Factor* was originally published in 1960, *Giles Goat-Boy* in 1966. These are important novels in recent history upon which we can now bring to bear twenty plus years of evolution.

Richard & Johnson Peabody, Gretchen, eds.: Gargoyle Magazine, *Fiction/ 86*; $7.95 paper

The *Gargoyle* fiction anthologies, published every other year, are becoming an increasingly important documentation of contemporary American short fiction and the subtly emerging trends.

Alan Ryan, ed.: *Vampires: Two centuries of Vampire Stories*; Doubleday; $15.95 cloth

A riveting annotated and headnoted anthology of Vampire history finds its intelligent literary niche in a culture obsessed by the supernatural and/or spine tingling thrills. This collection is a wonderful respite from the too frequent and serialized horror tales and movies which rely on gore v.s. belief.

James Dickey, *Alnilam*; Doubleday; $19.95 cloth

James Dickey's newest novel arrived at *CutBank* packaged like porcelain and clearly marked *Do Not Drop*. Of course the postal carrier did drop it, to the secretary's chagrin. Fortunately, this collector's novel was undamaged. *Alnilam* is not only a long-and-well-worth-the-wait novel which exceeds our most extravagant expectations of Dickey, but it is a lesson to young, ambitious writers in its thirty year gestation.

Curtis Zahn, *The Plight of a Lesser Sawyer's Cricket*; plays, prose and poems compiled by Clark Branson; Garland-Clarke Editions/Capra Press; $12.95 cloth, $7.95 paper

Clark Branson, *Howard Hawks: A Jungian Study*; Garland-Clarke Editions/Capra Press; $19.95 cloth, $10.95 paper

Capra has been a publisher and distributor to watch from its inception. From the young to current works of poet and short fiction writer Raymond Carver, Capra has grown from chapbooks to collections. Now it has expanded to studies of drama/poetry and cinema/psychology in these intellectually stimulating, accessible and important works on Curtis Zahn and Howard Hawks, compiled and written by Clark Branson. Garland-Clarke Editions/Capra Press has made an important stride in bridging the academic-creative and interdisciplinary gaps in contemporary literature. And it continues its precedent of early recognition of pivotal works and studies in American written and visual art.

Crossing the River, Ray Gonzalez, ed. The Permanent Press, Sag Harbor, NY 1987; $14.95 paper.

This newest anthology edited by Ray Gonzalez includes the poetry of over 64 western poets whose "work makes them historians" of not only the vast region and its past but anthropologists whose job it is to break down the stereotypes and unearth a new vision of the cultures and lands west of the Mississippi.

Gonzalez has succeeded in representing a cross section of younger poets and those who have been at work for a time who have influenced and viewed the American West but who do not necessarily live in the West. Gonzalez says

> . . . The poet writing in the West responds with a unique point of view that must be included in the over-all story.
>
> The result is a poetry that allows everyone to find what it is like to live in New Mexico, Texas, Montana, or the Northwest. These poems are able to take us there because they open outward and are not samples of closed "regional" writing that promotes one region over another. They are powerful poems that rise out of deserts, plains, mountains,

and rivers to celebrate a sense of place that can be found
in poets nationwide.

His anthology is indeed one of a kind in its representation of a huge region, thereby defying regionalism. His editing is meticulous and his vision is clear. *Crossing the River* is an encompassing document of time, place, and understanding.

Gonzalez, Ray, *Twilights and Chants*; James Andrews & Co., Inc.; Golden, Colorado; 1987. $8.95 paper.

Twilights and chants is Ray Gonzalez' third collection of poetry. The poems show his continued growth as a writer and his hard work. We were fortunate to have him in Montana to read from this new book last fall, to hear the poems in his own voice and envision his images in addition to experiencing his words on the page. He truly possesses his experiences and is able to then give them to us. Perhaps, he says it best in "Final Uncovering":

Close the book with the bleeding cover
and possess the smooth mirror
that guards your restless sleep,
your restless heart,
your invisible childhood flames
and childhood streams of warm water,
warm windows in family houses lighted at night,
burning through dawn,
smoking through long years
of life illuminating your own.

Through his work, we can make discoveries of our own.

McDonald, Walter, *The Flying Dutchman*; Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1987. $6.95 paper.

The Flying Dutchman, winner of the 1987 George Elliston poetry prize, is McDonald's best so far. He captures the land

Our children reel down water jugs
on ropes. Here in the dark
we stumble on stones we ram steel rods into
to break, gouge chunks into a bucket and tug

and go on digging. (Digging for Buried Water)

and its unending challenge. He captures the experience of the sky and the land from the sky. He gives us life, much his own and his relatives and neighbors, from above the ground and beneath it. McDonald moves with ease through cohabitant levels of existence.

Quinn, John, *The Wolf Last Seen*. Pacific House Books, Eugene, 1987. $19.95 cloth, $9.95 paper.

The Wolf Last Seen was first published in 1980 in a beautiful limited edition designed and printed by Harry Duncan. Pacific books have done us a favor in re-issuing this collection of Quinn's poetry and has maintained the high standards of design set forth in the first edition.

Quinn's poems continue to hold up — they entertain, instruct and take us from the major importance of all events to the inevitability and uncontrollability of them as well. In "Horse Lake Morning," he says, ". . . The Fish ran deep,/ and the sun kept coming up,/ it just kept coming up." His humor is precise, often scathing. His images are to the point.

Waters, Mary Ann, *The Exact Place;* Confluence Press, Lewiston, Idaho, 1987. $14.95 cloth.

Of Mary Ann Waters' poetry, Jonathan Holden says, "This impressive poetry collection . . . is a testament to the virtues of maturity. It is . . . *exact*, 'exact' in the full etymological sense of that word: every slurred, inaccurate, arbitrary possibility driven out, leaving only the necessary."

The Exact Place has been a short life-time in the making. And while exact in the mythological sense, the spot where Pegasus pawed the earth, it is encompassing of the poetic spirit and insight of one woman as she presents us with the world. And Waters misses nothing, spanning generations ("Daughter, Mother, Sister, Muse"), spanning geography (from "The Narrows" to "Horse and Rider: Wolf Point, Montana"), addressing the full gamut of emotional and intellectual experience within these regions.

Water's poems are punctuated by the mythological illustrations of Floyd Tennison DeWitt. While Pegasus, initially defined the exact place, in these illustrations, he goes through a transformation similar to the metamorphic structure of the book. Imagine him seeing *Daughter, Sister, Mother, Muse*; imagine him *Seeking the Elements, Bearing Witness* and finally finding *Illumination*. Then you can almost imagine the drawings, almost imagine the poems.

B.G. Pughe